

# Atheist contends job refusal religion issue

COLUMBIA, S.C. (AP) — Herb Silverman is an atheist who wants to be a notary public. South Carolina won't allow it.

Silverman contends that's because he refuses to acknowledge God, a requirement in the state constitution for all public officers. So Thursday he took his case to a higher authority — the state Supreme Court.

The battle is about more than just being a notary public, with the authority to witness signatures and, in this state, even preside at weddings. Silverman, a 54-year-old math profes-

or at the College of Charleston, says it's the first step in fighting for atheists' rights in a Bible Belt state.

"The first thing people ask you when you move here is what church you go to, and when you tell them that you don't believe in God, all of a sudden you don't have many friends," said Silverman, a Philadelphia native who moved to South Carolina in 1976.

A lower court judge sided with Silverman, throwing out the constitution's "God clause."

The state appealed, contending the case isn't about religion. Silverman,

who crossed out the word God in "so help me God," should not have crossed out any word on the notary application, and besides, he did not have enough of the required signatures on his second application, the state's lawyers say.

"If the word 'protect,' 'preserve' or 'defend,' had been struck from the application, the result would have been exactly the same," state lawyer Brad Waring told justices.

Secretary of State Jim Miles did return the application initially because Silverman had removed the word "God" from it, Waring said earlier.

When Silverman resubmitted the application to then-Gov. Carroll Campbell, it also had "God" crossed out, but was returned also because he was short a legislative signature, Waring said.

Under the state's complex rules for becoming a notary public, Silverman actually had the required number of legislators' signatures — eight — at the time of his first application. But redistricting had changed the required number to nine, and when his second application was rejected he opted to take the whole matter to court.

Since 1868, South Carolina's Constitution has declared: "No person who denies the existence of the Supreme Being shall hold any office under this Constitution."

As a state-sanctioned official, a notary public swears in the application to fulfill the duties of the office, and protect and defend the state and U.S. constitutions "so help me God."

In 1961, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled that states cannot require constitutional officers to profess a belief in God.

## Clinton readies for debate

BUFFALO, N.Y. (AP) — President Clinton's political advisers are sending their boss off to a pre-debate hideaway with three thoughts for Sunday night: Keep it simple, keep it safe and - above all - keep your cool.

The debate is the first of two head-to-head meetings that Republican Bob Dole hopes will shrink the president's double-digit lead in national polls. Mindful of the stakes, Clinton was flying Thursday to a scenic think tank in western New York for three days of rest, recreation and preparation.

The goal is for Clinton to look presidential and deferential without looking too defensive - and without making a lead-blowing mistake.

Campaign press secretary Joe Lockhart described Clinton as eager to resume debate preparations interrupted by the two-day Middle East summit.

"He's frankly apprehensive, given the head start Sen. Dole has had for the last five days," Lockhart said.

The president's political brain trust expects Dole to be highly critical of Clinton, with their boss most vulnerable to questions about Whitewater-related controversies, his integrity, drug policies and taxes.

They think Dole also will question the economy's strength, accuse the president of demonizing Republicans over Medicare and criticize his foreign policies — especially

with the Middle East peace process off track.

The drug issue dominated Dole's campaign leading into the debate after the Clinton administration claimed executive privilege in refusing to release an FBI report critical of his anti-drug policies.

One of the campaign's greatest fears is that Clinton flashes his temper to the national audience. A few aides are drafting questions designed to anger the president in debate preparation so he gets it out of his system. An example: Mr. President, the press has done a fine job uncovering the Whitewater affair and other controversies - why the ethical lapses?

## 7,500 troops to stay in Bosnia

WASHINGTON (AP) — About 7,500 U.S. troops will remain in Bosnia until March, the nation's top general told lawmakers today.

The latest Pentagon plan for the withdrawal of the 15,000-member U.S. troop contingent in Bosnia will require sending in 5,000 more as a "covering force" to help the withdrawing forces.

Gen. John Shalikashvili, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, told the Senate Armed Services Committee that a total of 7,500 U.S. soldiers would stay in Bosnia until mid-March, a larger

figure than the Pentagon provided in earlier statements.

"By 20 December we expect to be down to a force of 10,000 Americans, 7,500 covering and 2,500 withdrawing," Shalikashvili said.

Republicans on the committee complained of a "credibility gap" between the Clinton administration and Congress in light of repeated statements last year that the U.S. military mission in Bosnia would be over by Dec. 20.

## Russian, Chechen leaders sign accord

MOSCOW (AP) — Top Russian and Chechen leaders took what Prime Minister Viktor Chernomyrdin called a "big step forward" in the peace process today, signing a statement aimed at permanently settling the devastating war in Chechnya.

The signing came at the end of talks involving Chechen rebel leader Zelimkhan Yandarbiyev, who was visiting Moscow for the first time since a

truce was agreed to six weeks ago.

It gives new momentum to peace efforts that have largely been stalled since the signing of that accord, crafted by national security chief Alexander Lebed.

Earlier today, President Boris Yeltsin endorsed the accord for the first time since it was signed Aug. 23. His support came a day after Lebed's plan was blasted in Parliament.

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